Maharlika

PINOY LIFE IN THE MARIANAS

Vol. 2 No. 8 • www.saipantribune.com | A PUBLICATION OF THE SAIPAN TRIBUNE | Saturday, February 24, 2007

Kris rushed to hospital

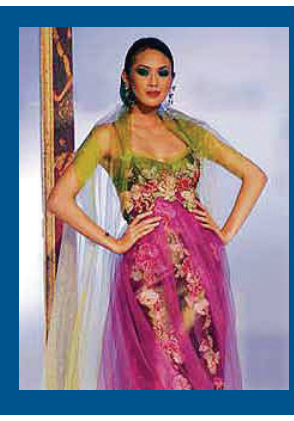
Television host Kris Aquino, who is in her seventh month of pregnancy, was rushed to the Makati Medical Center on Thursday after she "almost went into labor," according to an ABS-CBN executive who requested anonymity because she was not authorized to speak on the matter.

Page 5

Fashion as history lesson

As if coming up with new twists on pieces inspired by certain periods in Philippine history wasn't hard enough, Barge Ramos and company were also expected by organizers of the recently concluded "Hiblang Filipina" fashion show to produce "elegant and decent" clothes that incorporated indigenous fabrics.

Page 6



Pusang Gala film showing on Saipan set

A critically acclaimed independent Filipino film is coming to Saipan next month.

Mga Pusang Gala (Stray Cats) will be shown at Saipan Grand Hotel's Club V on March 9 and 10, 2007, Friday and Saturday. The screenings will start at 6pm, to be followed by a forum on gay and women's rights.

The film, a comic-romance fantasy that depicts sex and rela-

PUSANG Page 2

76 % of businesses put up by OFWs fail—study

By VERONICA UY
INQUIRER.NET

Seventy-six percent of businesses put up by overseas Filipino workers fail because the OFWs lack the skills, Foreign Affairs Assistant Secretary Luis Cruz said Thursday at the Dr. Alfredo J. Ganapin Advocacy Forum at the University of the Philippines.

Citing a study by the non-government organization Balikabayani, Cruz said the high failure rate was also because OFWs would lend money to their relatives.

"What makes the 24 percent succeed? Training and capability, and their families are relatively well-off," he said.

Ildefonso Bagasao of the Economic Resource Center of the Overseas Filipinos, which teaches OFWs financial skills, and Noel Esquela of the Center for Migrant Advocacy confirmed Cruz's assessment.

Esquela said many OFWs were lured into business enterprises even if they have no background about the business. "They are usually caught by the phrase, 'Mura lang ito [This is cheap],'" he said.

Esquela, who was in a band that toured the world for 10 years, told the story of an OFW whose cousin convinced him to pay $3,000 for five hectares of fishpond.

As the OFW also needed to leave for work abroad, he left the fishpond to his cousin. "Expectedly the business failed because neither he nor his cousin was familiar with it," Esquela said.

"Reintegration should start even before they leave for work abroad so that they can start saving and thinking about what to do with their money before they come home," he added.

People Power anniversary all but forgotten in Philippines

The 21st anniversary of "People Power" went virtually unnoticed in the Philippines Thursday—a far cry from Feb. 22, 1986, when more than a million Filipinos packed the streets of the capital calling for the removal of dictator Ferdinand Marcos.

For President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, who placed a simple wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, the anniversary had a double meaning as it marked a year since she crushed a military revolt

PEOPLE Page 2

AP

Philippine soldiers attend a low-key celebration of the 21st anniversary of the "People Power" revolution at the "Libingan ng mga Bayani" or Heroes' Cemetery south of Manila, Philippines Thursday Feb. 22, 2007. The four-day nearly bloodless 1986 "People Power" revolution ousted the late Philippine dictator Ferdinand Marcos from a 20-year rule and restored democracy in the country. On Thursday, Philippine forces went on alert to thwart any attempts to destabilize the government as the country held a low-key celebration.

Philippine President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, right, glances at former President Fidel Ramos as the latter addresses the crowd during the low-key celebration of the 21st anniversary of the "People Power" revolution at the "Libingan ng mga Bayani" or Heroes' Cemetery south of Manila, Philippines Thursday Feb. 22, 2007.

AP

FREE text to the Philippines Includes $20 Airtime

GSM SIMCARD only $39.95

310 470

HafaTEL
One World One Phone
Call: 235 / 233-HAFA (4232)

PINOYNEWS

Info caravan takes San Roque

The ongoing information campaign, Info Caravan Project, of the Philippine Consulate in the CNMI and its attached agencies Philippine Overseas Labor Office and the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration will reach the San Roque village this Sunday.

Labor representative Joan Lourdes Lavilla OWWA welfare said the Info Caravan campaign would be held at the San Roque Parish Church starting at 11am onwards. She said Filipino workers residing around the village are invited to the Info Caravan tomorrow.

The caravan is a campaign to disseminate information about the services of the Philippine Consulate General in the CNMI and its sub-offices such as the Philippine Overseas Labor Office and the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration.

San Roque is the third village that the Consulate office would have visited since January this year.

The campaign this Sunday will be in collaboration with the OWWA-OFW Support Group. Consulate officials will lead the Information Caravan.

The campaign is part of extra efforts to increase awareness among overseas Filipino workers in the CNMI about their rights and privileges such as maintaining their OWWA membership status.

The caravan will visit villages around the CNMI and talk to Filipino workers and some of their employers. ***(Marconi Calindas)***

March 4 is a free health screening day

By MARCONI CALINDAS
REPORTER

The Philippine Consulate General's Philippine Overseas Labor Office and the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration in the CNMI will hold once again a free health screening on March 4, Sunday.

The health screening will start from 8am and will end at 12pm.

OWWA welfare officer Leonor Mabagal said the free health screening is for all overseas Filipino workers. The services that will be included during the free health consultation are: blood pressure, blood sugar level, and eye check up.

Participants who would want to have their blood sugar level checked are again advised to refrain from eating and drinking fluids from midnight of March 3 until the check up.

The activity is in collaboration with the OWWA-OFW Support Group and volunteer medical team.

In December 2006, the Philippine Consulate exceeded its target, the first time it happened since the Consulate began the program.

Mabagal said that over 400 overseas Filipino workers trooped to the Philippine Overseas Labor Office at the Marianas Business Plaza in Susupe to avail of the free health screening in December.

Mabagal said her office had anticipated that the health screening would attract a little more than the usual turnout, which is always around 140 to 150, so they prepared materials and medicines to accommodate only a little over 300 people.

Due to the unexpected number of people who showed up, POLO and OWWA were forced to turn down some of them. The health screening ended a little after 2pm that day.

The health screening, for the first time also, included a free eye check up, courtesy of volunteers from the Hardt Eye Clinic.

Mabagal said the generosity of clinic owner Dr. David Hardt added tremendously to the success of the event. Hardt himself was present to provide free eye consultations.

She also attributed the event's success to the free ride to the POLO and OWWA offices that was provided by the El Shaddai group in the CNMI. She also thanked all volunteers who helped during the event. She said she highly appreciates the volunteerism among the nurses and other medical team members that gave their free time to help their countrymen.

'Noynoy' Aquino: 'I'm a combination of my parents'

By MAILA AGER
INQUIRER.NET

MANILA—As the only son of former President Corazon Aquino and the martyred former senator Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino Jr., Tarlac Representative Benigno "Noynoy" Aquino III admits to feeling pressure to surpass his parents' achievements, "not only from the family...but more so, from other people."

"There have been several instances when their [other politicians'] staff had mentioned that you are not an Aquino, you don't have to go to this extreme of fighting this

current regime," he said in an interview with INQUIRER.net editors and reporters Tuesday.

But he said the fight to preserve democracy should not be the exclusive turf of the Aquinos. "Everybody should be participative in this current crisis that our democracy is facing," he said.

Nevertheless, Congressman Aquino said he had long acknowledged he may never surpass his parents' contributions to the country and this has eased the pressure he would otherwise have to bear all the time.

This acknowledgment, he added, has also made him more efficient at fulfilling his duties as representative of Tarlac and as member of Congress.

Today, he said he believes he has acquired some of the best traits of his father, who he described as an expert in convincing people, and mother, who had always been "consensus-generating" in her style of governance.

PEOPLE

FROM PAGE 1

against her administration.

A year on, Arroyo's hold on power has become stronger, much due to the debt she owes to the military, analysts have said.

Twenty-eight officers and soldiers are facing courts martial, possibly at the end of the month, for their part in the failed plot.

For former president Fidel Ramos, who broke ranks with the Marcos regime and joined the church-led mass movement that filled Epifanio de los Santos Avenue (EDSA), the anniversary appears to have lost much of its meaning to many Filipinos.

"Many of our young people and even elected leaders today seem indifferent to the spirit of what has become known as the EDSA Revolution," he said Thursday.

"Regretfully, the prevailing view is that EDSA was no big deal ... that EDSA is no longer that important seems more and more the conventional wisdom ... as the event recedes into the fog of history," he said.

Ramos, who was commander of the former Philippine Constabulary, and Marcos' then defense minister Juan Ponce Enrile broke away from the dictator on the night of the 22nd, along with a loyal band of officers and soldiers.

Among them was a young, charismatic colonel Gregorio "Gringo" Honasan, who later went on to earn a reputation as the leader of failed coups and is now awaiting trial for his part in abortive putsches against Arroyo.

Holed up at police headquarters at Camp Crame, just across EDSA from the headquarters of the Philippine military, Ramos and Enrile sent out urgent calls over radio stations for the people to help them.

Hundreds of thousands responded. In the tense days that followed, priests, nuns, ordinary citizens and children linked arms with the rebels and faced down, without violence, the tanks and machine guns of government troops.

That incident sparked what became known as "People Power," or the EDSA Revolution, that installed opposition leader Corazon Aquino as president after Marcos and his family were spirited out of the presidential palace on the night of February 25 and into exile.

However the nation's attention is now more focused on charges that the military was behind a rash of unexplained killings and on jockeying for the congressional and local elections in May. ***(AFP)***

PUSANG

FROM PAGE 1

tionships in a way never before seen in Philippine cinema, will be shown to the island audience in celebration of International Women's Month.

Directed by Ellen Ongkeko-Marfil, *Mga Pusang Gala* is based on the Palanca Award winning play *Mga Estranghero at Ang Gabi* (Strangers and the Night) by screenplay writer Jun Lana. Saipan Grand Hotel's events manager Oscar Yema served as assistant director and line producer in the making of the film.

Mga Pusang Gala depicts the parallel love lives of Marta (Irma Adlawan), a woman advertising professional, and her gay friend and landlord Boyet (Ricky Davao), a romance novelist. The two are neighbors in a duplex. They pine for men to fulfill their dreams and they play the stereotypical roles of woman and gay in pursuit of their hopes. But their fantasy soon unravels into a delusion. What began as a love story turns into a dark tale of revenge, with a twist.

The film opened ProGay Philippines' 3rd Pink Film Festival in June 2005 and had a commercial run in the Philippines in August 2005. It was named one of the best three films of 2005 by Pasado Awards, given by an association of Filipino teachers. It also received nominations for best film, best director, best actor and best actress, among others, at the Philippines' Famas and Star Awards.

In 2006, *Mga Pusang Gala* won the First Feature Award at Frameline30, the 30th San Francisco International LGBT Film Festival.

The film was featured in various film festivals, including the 16th International Women's Film Festival held in the Philippines, the 20th Frobough Film Festival in Switzerland, and the Newfest New York LGTB Festival last year.

The Saipan screening of *Mga Pusang Gala* is sponsored by Saipan Grand Hotel and Fiesta Resort and Spa Saipan, in collaboration with the non-profit group RaveSaipan.

The $8 ticket cost includes entrance to the show, as well as to Club V on the same night. For more information, call Oscar Yema at 483-6489 or email ravesaipan@gmail.com. ***(Agnes E. Donato)***

Ramon Awit is UFO's new president

Filipino community leader Ramon Awit was elected Sunday as the new president of United Filipino Organization.

"I'm so thankful for the trust of our kababayan. I will do my best to serve in my capacity as UFO president," said Awit yesterday.

He said UFO work is not new to him having been elected as its vice president twice in previous years.

"I've been with the organization but this is my first time to assume the presidency. So I treat this as a new and different challenge," he said.

Awit replaced former president Cory Borja, who assumed the top organizational position when Roland Pamintuan had stepped down.

Awit said he aims to continue the annual activities of the group such as the UFO Inter-Organizational Basketball League, Holy Week climb to Mt. Tapochau, and Pistang Pinoy celebration in June, among others.

"I will keep the projects that we've started," he said.

He said the UFO basketball league is tentatively set for April 15.

Pistang Pinoy is held every second Sunday of June, in time for the June 12 Philippine Independence day celebration.

Meantime, Awit said that one of his first projects is to fulfill the organization's earlier promise to donate a white board to the San Roque church.

"That's an old plan of the organization, which I want to implement now," he said.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Ramon Awit, seated center, poses with other newly elected officers of the United Filipino Organization. Seated from left:Ladyver Canape, Flor Miranda, Olive Yana, Ramon Awit, Meanne Madriaga, Marie Caamic. Standing from left: Mylene Macapagal, Manny Po, Lito Espino, Nel Matanguihan, Minda Castro.

New project

Awit, who has been on Saipan for 15 years, said that as new president of UFO, he intends to tap the expertise of often overlooked group of leaders —the UFO board of directors who are actually presidents of different Filipino organizations in the CNMI.

"They are often neglected so I want to create committees which they will head to maximize their leadership and the use of their skills and talents," said Awit.

He said he intends to have cultural, sports, health, and medical committees which can be headed by the directors.

These committee would have specific tasks to do.

For instance, the medical and health committee would conduct health screening tests—blood pressure and sugar check—in different villages.

"I'm getting a lot of requests for this kind of outreach—health screening. Not all of them can go to the Consulate on certain Sundays because they live far. So we want to bring the service to their area," he said

Awit, who is now a businessman, first worked for Micronesian Brewers Corp. more than a decade ago.

He also worked as assistant manager at Tony Roma's and Capricciosa.

He later worked for Pacific Island Aviation as ramp and cargo agent supervisor and at Marianas Electronics as sales and service associate manager.

Last week's UFO election was held at Aqua Resort's Rey Lounge.

The elected officers of UFO for 2007-2008 are the following:

- President: Ramon Awit (LIPS)
- Vice Pres. Adm: Flor Miranda (SIP)
- Vice Pres. Int: Manny Po (MAFEA)
- Vice Pres. Ext: Lito Espino (NMBA)
- Secretary: Olive Yana (VISMINDA)
- Asst. Sect: Marie Caamic (BAYANI)
- Treasurer: Meanne Madriaga (BAYANI)
- Asst. Treas: Ladyver Canape (CNMI POWER)
- Auditor: Nel Matanguihan (MIFICPA)
- P.R.O: Minda Castro (MAFILWA)
- Asst. P.R.O: Mylene Macapagal (BAYANI ASS.)

LABOR FRONT

Ely's concerns and Labor's response

By FERDIE P. DE LA TORRE
REPORTER

A reader named Ely wrote Maharlika and asked some labor issues. This writer brought the questions to the Department of Labor. Here are Ely's concerns and the response of Labor, through its legal counsel assistant attorney general Dorothy E. Hill.

Q: What if the president of a company runs away and the acting president is a nonresident worker with no assets and there are wages owed to an employee?

Hill: Anyone with operational control over a business may be held liable for unpaid wages under the Minimum Wage and Hour Act. If the employee is a nonresident worker, there should also be an employment bond covering up three months wages that Labor may tap.

Q: Can a company request that its nonresident employees not report to work or receive pay due to insufficient work?

Hill: No material changes in the conditions of employment of a nonresident, including hours of work, temporary lay off or wage rate, may be made without approval of the Labor director. 3CMC §4437(d).

Q: If a company is delayed in paying salary and the employee files a complaint and reaches a settlement, can the employer then terminate the employee upon settlement?

Hill: It would constitute a serious violation of both the Nonresident Workers' Act and the Minimum Wage and Hour Act to retaliate against an employee for filing a complaint under either statute. Indeed, it is a criminal violation to retaliate against someone who files a wage claim under the Minimum Wage and Hour Act. 4 CMC §9242.

Submit questions on labor issues to *Saipan Tribune* via e-mail at editor@saipantribune.com, or by calling 235-6397, 235-2440, or 235-8747 and leaving a message at Ext. 133 or 135. You may also submit questions in person by writing it down and dropping it off at the *Saipan Tribune*'s office on the second floor of the CIC Centre on Beach Road, Garapan.

Masons new officers installed

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
REPORTER

The newly-elected and appointed officers of this year's Emon Lodge No. 179 Free and Accepted Masons Under the Jurisdiction of the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of the Philippines were installed last week at the Saipan World Resort's Royal Taga.

Attorney General Matthew T. Gregory served as the guest speaker, while Philippine Consul General Wilfredo DL. Maximo delivered an inspirational address.

Last year's senior warden Gener C. Garcia was installed as the Worshipful Master for the Masonic Year 2007-2008.

Jaime I. Villamor was elected as senior warden, and Isagani I. Benoza was chosen as junior warden.

Also elected were Joselito R. Arce Jr., treasurer; Romulo A. Cayetano, secretary; Jorge M. Manalili, auditor; Eli C. Buenaventura, chaplain; Wilfredo G. Ching, marshal; Pepe R. Crisostomo, senior deacon; Tracy Jon N. Miranda, junior deacon; and Celso S. Gianchand, orator.

Other officers chosen were Casiano M. Bostre, lecturer; Amando G. Neglerio, almoner; Daniel E. Banez, senior steward; Roque O. Pagalanan Jr., junior steward; Levy N. Abul II, organist, and Victor G. Brana, tyler.

Ernest J. Strange is the district deputy grand master, Jaime Villamor is the district grand lecturer, and Joselito Arce Jr. is the grand lodge inspector.

Maximo congratulated the new officers and members and expressed hope that this year's Masonic theme "Masons in creed and in deed" serve to "renew and fortify the membership's commitment to the Freemason ideals of unselfish service for God and country, and the promotion of understanding, peace and love among all peoples."

FERDIE DE LA TORRE

Officers and members of the Emon Lodge No. 179 Free and Accepted Masons gather for the presentation of apron and jewel during Saturday's installation of the newly-elected and appointed officers for Masonic Year 2007-2008 at the Saipan World Resort.

Maximo said he believes that Emon Lodge No. 179 under its new leadership will continue to build up on the achievements of past leaders and maintain the organization's "commendable work in the CNMI."

Gov. Benigno R. Fitial and Lt. Gov. Timothy P. Villagomez, in their message, expressed appreciation to the contributions of Masons "toward the betterment of our community."

"The beginning of this Lodge in the 1960s in the Marshall Islands and its subsequent re-establishment in Saipan in the 1990s is only characteristic of the perseverance demonstrated by Freemasons throughout history in pursuing the principles of faith, goodwill and service," said Fitial and Villagomez.

Masons are also known as Freemasons. They belong to the oldest and largest fraternal organization in the world. The fraternity uses the tools of ancient architectural craftsmen symbolically in a system of instruction designed to build character and moral values in its members.

Last year, the Fitial administration commended Masons for their continued support of Shriners Children's Burn Centers.

The Shriners centers in Hawaii and California treat crippled and burn children worldwide. Some of the Masons' charitable contributions go to that facilities.

'End political killings before elections' —Amnesty

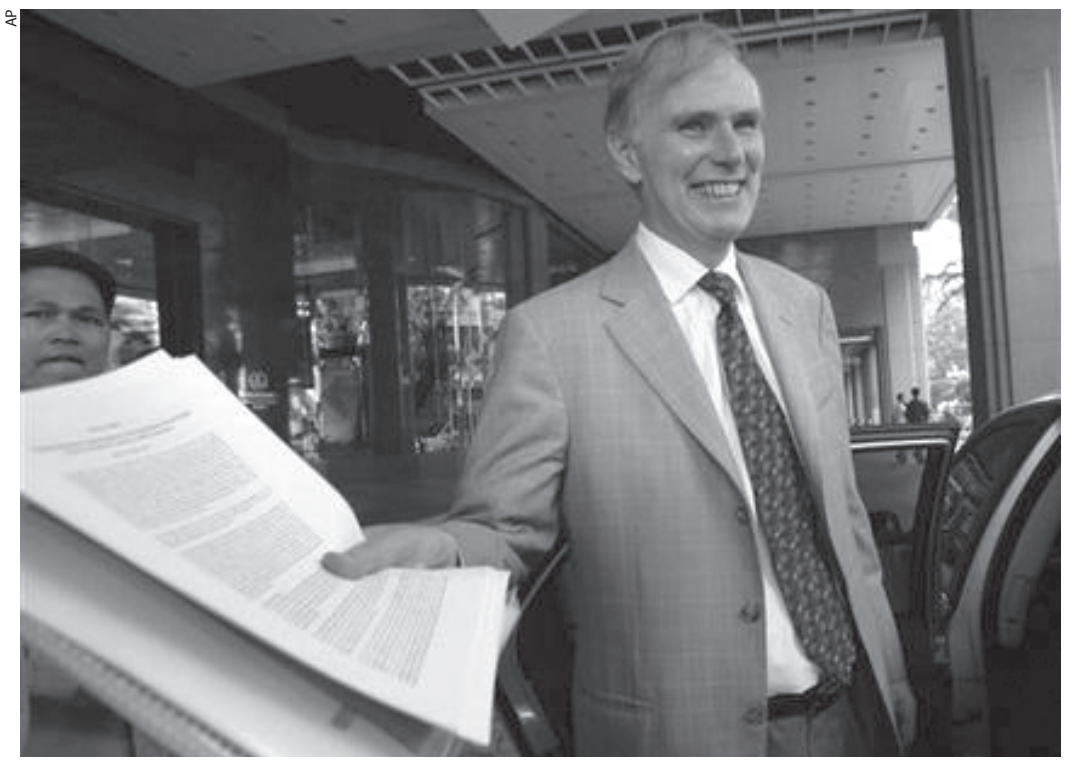
MANILA, Philippines—The respected human rights group Amnesty International (AI) has urged the government and "all political parties and groups" to "act decisively to end… political killings" before the tension that attends Philippine elections leads to "a further escalation of violence" in the run-up to the May polls.

In a press statement, Natalie Hill, AI's deputy Asia-Pacific director, said the initial findings of United Nations special rapporteur Philip Alston and the release of the Melo Commission report presented a "body of evidence…so compelling that I can no longer be ignored: there is substantial confirmation of the pattern of political killings in the Philippines."

At the same time, Hill noted that "the election period would be fraught with its own tensions" and said that it was "essential that the manifestos of all political parties commit to working strenuously to put an end to the ongoing killings and so minimize the risk of a further escalation of violence during the polls."

She also tapped into the religious culture of the predominantly Catholic country, saying: "As the Philippines enters the period of Lent, all political parties and civil society groups need to reflect on the numerous human lives that have been lost and resolve to end these killings."

AP



Professor Philip Alston, the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial Killings, shows his statement shortly after a news conference Wednesday Feb. 21, 2007 at suburban Makati city east of Manila, Philippines to report on his 10-day trip here on the spate of political killings around the country. Alston, who is to draft the report and submit to the U.N. Human Rights council in three months, said a significant number of killings of left-wing activists can be traced back to soldiers and urged the military to investigate them. The human rights group Karapatan has listed 832 alleged summary killings since 2001, including deaths of 356 left-wing activists,and blamed on security forces.

Hill also called on "those responsible for or complicit in the killings, particularly military elements identified by the Melo Commission and the UN expert" to "fully support the remedial measures implemented by the government and cooperate with investigators."

Both Alston and the fact-finding commission chaired by retired Supreme Court justice Jose Melo said that the military was behind most of the extrajudicial killings that human rights organizations had estimated to have claimed more than 830 lives since President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo came to power in 2001.

The Melo Commission was created by Arroyo in August last year following increasing international criticism for the bloodshed. Among those who scored her administration's human rights record was AI, which issued a scathing report in which it noted a pattern to the killings and voiced concern that state security forces were involved.

Hill took note of the government's response to the Melo Commission report, "a six-point action plan, the implementation of which will be crucial to ending the killings," pointing out that "a lack of accountability for such political killings remains a critical challenge: to date there has not been one conviction, despite the hundreds of killings, primarily of legal leftist activists, over the past six years."

The plan includes the setting up of special courts to hasten the resolution of unexplained murders.

However, Hill has also urged government to "ensure effective witness protection for all those involved in court proceedings, including victims and their relatives."

"One major obstacle to stopping the cycle of political executions is the lack of effective witness protection," she observed. "Witnesses are afraid to come forward to report killings because of threats and intimidation."

"We should remember that most of the victims were not even members of armed groups, even though they may have sympathized with their ideology," Hill said.

"It is a matter of importance for everyone in the Philippines that individuals should be able to affiliate with the political party or group of their choice and not be subject to politically motivated violence as a result," she added. ***(INQUIRER.net)***

MILITARY COUNTERATTACKS

It's Alston who is in denial

By CHRISTINE AVENDAÑO
INQUIRER

MANILA, Philippines—Armed Forces Chief of Staff Gen. Hermogenes Esperon Thursday got back at United Nations Special Rapporteur Philip Alston, saying it was the latter and not the military who was in denial about the extrajudicial killings in the country.

Speaking at a news conference in Camp Aguinaldo, Esperon expressed offense at Alston's statement that the Philippine government, particularly the Armed Forces of the Philippines, was not doing enough to address the unabated killings of journalists and leftist activists.

He assailed the UN official for not appreciating the military's position that most of the deaths were a result of internal fighting in the Communist Party of the Philippines-New People's Army, and for calling for a reevaluation of the government's counterinsurgency program.

He said he believed that Alston's statements on Wednesday would not sit well with many AFP members, including the soldiers at the frontlines in the fight against the 39-year-old communist insurgency.

Esperon called the news conference to comment on the initial results of Alston's 10-day fact-finding mission, as well as to raise "disagreements" with the findings of the Melo Commission, both of which held the military accountable for the killings.

"[Alston's UN team] said we were in denial... I deny that," Esperon said in reaction to Alston's statement that the military "remains in a state of almost total denial" about the killings.

"We recognize there are extrajudicial killings. We recognize that these are happening. That is why we appreciate that there is such a thing as a Melo Commission, and ... even if Mr. Alston was here for only 10 days, it's certainly something we have to reckon with. The output is substantive," Esperon said.

He added that Alston "might be in a state of denial himself," citing the latter's supposed "refusal to believe that the CPP-NPA could perpetrate such killings."

Credibility

The UN special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions was briefed by defense and military officials last week, and furnished a copy of the AFP report that the CPP-NPA was responsible for 1,227 liquidations.

Esperon said Alston had mentioned that the military report on the CPP-NPA liquidations was not credible because the NPA did not admit to the murders and human rights organizations did not document them.

"So what is he telling us? That if it is owned by the NPA it is credible? Is he saying that the NPA is more credible than me, or the AFP?" Esperon said.

Asked if he thought Alston was biased for the Left, he said: "It's up to you to conclude."

Pressed further on why he thought Alston refused to believe the military report, Esperon said he did not know. "But I know that on the first day that he was here, he talked to seven groups [such as] Karapatan, Bayan, Gabriela, among others."

Esperon also scoffed at Alston's questioning of the government's counterinsurgency program:

"I do not know how familiar he is with other insurgencies, but as he admits, he is here for the first time and stayed here for the last 10 days.

2-year deadline set for RP to be out of IPR watch list

By ERWIN OLIVA
INQUIRER.NET

MANILA, PHILIPPINES—Stakeholders in the protection of intellectual property rights in the Philippines said it would bat for the retention of the Philippines in a United States Trade Representative watch list of IPR violators but hope to be out of that list in two years.

This position is a turnaround from previous recommendations pushing for the removal of the country from the watch list of the Special 301 Report of the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR).

"It was recommended that the Philippines be retained in the watch list," said John Lesaca, chairman of the Intellectual Property (IP) Coalition and director Optical Media Board (OMB) representing private sector, in an interview with INQUIRER.net.

He said the group has already sent a copy of its recommendations giving the country at least two years to comply with the USTR guidelines.

The USTR Special 301 Report identifies countries that deny adequate and effective IPR protection. Country's falling under the priority watch list are those that do not provide adequate IPR enforcement, while those in the watch list are those that require bilateral attention to address IPR concerns, a statement from the IP Office of the Philippines said.

The highest level, the priority foreign country, are countries that do not address piracy problems and are subject to US trade sanctions.

IP Coalition director and general counsel Jun Rodriguez stressed that the group aims to "project an image of reasonableness" despite the Philippines being downgraded from the priority to the ordinary watch list.

Lesaca said the realistic position will allow government to implement recent reforms in the enforcement of IPR laws.

"We could not lie and say we should be taken out of the list. So we're batting for a status quo," added Rodriguez.

Lesaca said the IP Coalition group is focusing on training Philippine courts in dealing with IPR-related cases.

"Lawyers will always delay cases in the interest of due process but ultimately the judge decides the pace of cases," he said.

He will also push for the "institutionalization" of the OMB that would require the agency to beef up its administrative functions and get rid of its image as just a "raiding agency."

The OMB currently employs more than 60 people.

Lesaca said the agency mandated to regulate the optical media industry is cash-strapped with a budget of about P50 million every year, which goes mostly to salaries.

RP firm offers group text messaging for Filipinos

By ERWIN OLIVA
INQUIRER.NET

MANILA, PHILIPPINES—Philippines-based Axis Global Interactive Inc. (AGI) is offering a group text messaging service to local customers. This was after it acquired a license to locally sell a group text messaging service, dubbed Moblabber, developed by San Francisco-based Feedtext Inc.

The company said the service will be available initially to Smart subscribers, under the brand Moblabber Philippines.

In an interview, Axis Global Interactive marketing manager Richelle Chan said the service is currently being tested in other mobile networks.

Moblabber Philippines is dubbed as "a fun and useful social networking service geared for both web and mobile phone interaction made available to the Philippine market."

Smart subscribers can now sign up for free to the service. Upon activation, they can enjoy individual posting of messages and sending of messages to members of their group.

Users can register online or through the text-messaging, the company said.

Moblabber allows subscribers to create user profiles and join interest-centric groups, upload photos, send and receive messages to members of groups—all using a mobile phone.

Also a mobile social networking service, Moblabber hopes to offer quicker communication system to enable subscribers to broadcast messages to multiple recipients, simultaneously.

After signing up at the Moblabber website, users can start creating groups. They can also start sending email invites to friends .

Smart users can register by typing "BLAB (nickname)/(password)" then send to 2625.

"Service is initially available to SMART subscribers, other carriers to follow in the next few weeks. Once a member, they can now make use of the rest mobile features," the company added.

Axis Global Interactive is a subsidiary of Philippine technology distributor Axis Global Technologies.

PINOYSTYLE

Kris rushed to hospital, docs order bed rest

By BAYANI SAN DIEGO JR.
INQUIRER

Television host Kris Aquino, who is in her seventh month of pregnancy, was rushed to the Makati Medical Center on Thursday after she "almost went into labor," according to an ABS-CBN executive who requested anonymity because she was not authorized to speak on the matter.

Aquino's close friend and co-host on the ABS-CBN talk show "The Buzz," Boy Abunda, however, confirmed that Kris was taken to the hospital around "lunch time Thursday."

"When she woke up at 5 p.m. [Thursday], she seemed okay," Abunda said. "The term used by the doctor was false labor brought about by stress. She had had stomach pains."

'Very delicate'

Another close friend of Aquino's told the Philippine Daily Inquirer that an induced delivery was prevented and her doctors ordered complete bed rest.

"She will be staying in the hospital for the next three or four days," Abunda said. "The doctor told her that her condition is very delicate, that she should rest and avoid all sorts of stress, that she should stop watching TV and reading tabloids."

The emergency was purportedly brought on by Aquino's distress over the latest controversy in her life: The alleged illicit affair between her husband, James Yap, and a beauty clinic facial attendant identified only as Hope.

In an interview with manager-entertainment columnist Lolit Solis for the GMA-7 talk show "Star Talk," Hope reportedly divulged "intimate" details of her purported affair with Yap.

The full interview will air on Saturday, but excerpts were shown Thursday night on GMA-7's prime-time news show, "24 Oras."

Kris Aquino

In the excerpt, Hope asked televiewers not to judge her. "I am just a woman who fell in love," she said in Filipino.

Sexually graphic text

Details of Hope's confession also saw print in the tabloids, according to another close friend of Aquino's.

"One report claimed that Hope showed as proof of Yap's sexually graphic text messages to her. The scandal could've triggered the emergency," the friend said.

Asked to comment, Abunda said: "I am not discounting the possibility that this [emergency] was caused by the intrigues. She is experiencing real pain now. I just want to tell the people: Kris is the victim here. If she were not pregnant, she will fight [all the intrigue-mongers]."

Last Sunday on The Buzz, Aquino confirmed she was having marital problems. Yap later owned up to his mistake and promised on air, "Hindi na ito maulit [This will not happen again].

The couple, however, declined to go into details.

"It should be between the two of us," Aquino said on the show. She said she had decided to remain married to Yap, in spite of the "problems."

"I will not allow anyone to destroy my marriage," she said.

ONLY IN HOLLYWOOD

Will Smith's pursuit of Oscar and 'happyness' with Jaden

By RUBEN V. NEPALES
INQUIRER

LOS ANGELES—HOW IS A nominee's life like during the awards season, which culminates with the Oscars this Sunday?

Will Smith, who is in the running for Best Actor for his performance in the moving drama "The Pursuit of Happyness," described to us in an interview how it was like when he was nominated for the first time, thanks to "Ali."

He said, "That six-week period between the nomination and the awards show for 'Ali' was one of the most fun, roller coaster-like rides of my life. During that period, everybody's like a winner. Every night, you go out and see the same people. It's so much fun. Everybody in the world knows. But when you get to the actual awards show, it becomes a competition—something gets taken off. To be nominated is absolutely incredible. It's something that very few people will ever experience. But to make this movie with my son (Jaden Christopher Syre Smith), the experience we had making this movie—there's no award that could ever bring what that feeling was."

Jaden, 8, who is an Oscar presenter on Sunday (he has the honor of being one of the youngest presenters in the history of the Academy Awards), joined his dad halfway through this press con. The two are also father and son in "The Pursuit of Happyness," which is based on the inspiring true story of Chris Gardner, a struggling San Francisco salesman who finds himself and his son evicted from their apartment with nowhere to go. When Chris manages to get an internship at one of America's top brokerage firms, he and his son endure many hardships, including spending the night in a public restroom (one of the film's emotionally wrenching scenes which did happen in real life).

Watching and listening to the Smiths interact during the interview was a treat. Here's how it went:

Will (W): Oh, my man. Ladies and gentlemen, Jaden Christopher Syre Smith (applause as Jaden enters the room with his equally famous mom, Jada Pinkett Smith, who stays at the back and watches her two "boys"). Hey, what's up, man?

Jaden (J): Nothing.

W: You want your own chair or you're going to sit on my lap? You feel safe?

J: Here you go (he sits on his own chair).

W: (To Jaden) Good to see you. (To the members of the press) This is his first press conference.

Reporter (R): You are really wonderful in the movie.

J: Thank you.

R: You are just as good as your dad. But don't tell him that.

J: You, too.

R: Was it easy to work with your dad? Did he help you or did you help him?

J: I helped him (laughter).

R: In which scene did you have fun?

J: When I was sleeping…

W: Where? On the bus?

J: No, I was sleeping in my bed.

W: Oh, when you were sleeping on the bed at the beginning of the movie. That's all you remember because you were asleep for real (laughter).

R: What was it like for your son to see you on a professional level, outside being a dad?

W: (To Jaden) Was it different working with me than at home or did it feel the same? Was I different?

J: You were completely different.

W: Oh, what did I do?

J: You were acting (laughter).

Will Will (sorry, we couldn't resist that word play) bag the Oscar gold this second time around? Experts say he is a dark horse—the bets are on Forest Whitaker ("The Last King of Scotland"), who has swept the Best Actor races in all the earlier awards shows, including the Golden Globe, and veteran Peter O'Toole ("Venus"), a sentimental favorite.

Music and lyrics

After the interview, Will introduced Seal, who wrote the lyrics and composed the music (with Christopher Bruce) of the film's theme song, "A Father's Way." Seal, backed by two musicians, sang the ballad and played the guitar. Yes, this was a truly memorable afternoon at the Beverly Hilton.

The award-winning singer-composer stayed for a chat. The husband of model Heidi Klum, speaking in his native British accent, revealed how he creates those hits, including "Kiss for a Rose" and "Love's Divine": "I write whenever I feel inspired. I once read something about Paul Simon whom I respect a great deal. I read that he woke up at 9 every morning and between the hours of 10 a.m. and 12 noon, he wrote. I admire that but I can't do that. I'm probably the opposite. I write whenever I feel the urge to write something on paper."

The artist continued, "However, having said that, I don't really have that luxury anymore because I have a wife and kids. I can't be sitting at a restaurant with my kids and all of a sudden, go, 'Oh, I feel inspired. Bye-bye. I am going home to write (laughter).' I used to be able to do that but it doesn't work like that anymore because the kids don't really understand that you're inspired. They don't really care about any of that. They care about you being here, right now. So I have to be a little bit more creative with my time management now. I write a lot at night. I'm very much a night owl and that's the quietest time in my house."

DOLLYWOOD

I hope James takes care of Kris & their baby—Joey Marquez

By DOLLY ANNE CARVAJAL
INQUIRER

Got a surprise call from my fave kumpare Joey Marquez. Funny—even if he's one of the hosts of "S-Files," he's not updated on show biz happenings.

"I get to know the news when I'm in the studio na," he said. I teased him: "That's because off-cam your world revolves around girls. You have no time for chismis!"

He laughed. "Basta ako, admit na lang ako ng admit kahit hindi totoo minsan ang chismis para wala ng maraming tanong!"

Kris Aquino and James Yap

He suddenly turned serious. "Is it true that Kris and James' marriage is on the rocks?" I shot back, "Uyyy! Concerned siya!" He replied, "Seriously, I hope it's not true. I really hope James takes care of Kris and their baby."

Beneath Joey's playful image is a pure heart. I've seen girls come and go in his life. Even when the water runs dry in his relationships, he makes sure he doesn't burn the bridges leading to his kids. He once said, "My children are the only ones who will truly love me till the end."

His shortcomings as a lover are more than compensated for by his being a dedicated father. Hopefully, aside from Kris and basketball, that's something Joey and James will have in common after Kris gives birth.

Fatal attraction?

Hope (rumored girl and former facialist of James Yap) better come out and say what she has to say. All sorts of crazy stories are circulating about this mystery girl. Some quarters insist she's fatally attracted to James. Others claim she was just a pawn used to besmirch the good name of the beauty clinic she used to work for.

Kris and James have said their piece and made peace. It's Hope's turn. Who's the one hopelessly in love?

Teamwork

Rufa Mae Quinto saw her ex-BF, cager Rudy Hatfield, when she was a guest at the PBA games recently. But they didn't get a chance to talk. "Kahit noong kami pa, his focus is on the ball when he has a game," she said. "Deadma to the world yun pag nasa court. Katuwa lang that while I was singing, the crowd was cheering Hatfield! Even split na kami, I remain a fan of his team." But her teamwork with BF Erik Santos is what keeps her heart bouncing these days.

No-show

Gretchen Barretto was a no-show at the birthday bash of Sen. Jinggoy Estrada because she didn't want a contrived "beso-beso" encounter with Lani Mercado. As our common friend says, "Greta is not plastic. She never pretends. Ayaw niya pagpistahan pagkikita nila ni Lani."

Heard Lani was not at Jinggoy's party, either. Was she wary of seeing Greta there? Their silent war rages still! Who will fire the next bullet and go BONG tarat tarat?!

'You Got Me!'

Toni Gonzaga shines once more in the romantic movie "You Got Me!" (opens Feb. 28). It's directed by Cathy Garcia-Molina (who was also at the helm of Toni and Sam's P100-million hit "You Are The One"). Toni plays Lt. Amor Santander, a headstrong policewoman whose weakness is love.

And what does she love about her two leading men Sam Milby and Zanjoe Marudo? "Sam is a good actor. I am so at home with him. Zanjoe is eager to learn and fun to be with."

Fashion as history lesson

By ALEX VERGARA
INQUIRER

As if coming up with new twists on pieces inspired by certain periods in Philippine history wasn't hard enough, Barge Ramos and company were also expected by organizers of the recently concluded "Hiblang Filipina" fashion show to produce "elegant and decent" clothes that incorporated indigenous fabrics.

Designed to drum up interest in the 70th anniversary of women's suffrage in the Philippines, the dinner show at the Manila Hotel's Fiesta Pavilion gathered 14 of the country's top fashion designers, who presented their respective takes on clothes that harked as far back as the Spanish era.

Apart from the late Spanish era, other periods represented in the show were American Colonial, Commonwealth, Pre-war/post-war, the 1980s and, of course, the new millennium.

So that their works wouldn't overlap with one another, the designers agreed to group themselves into threes or twos per period.

In fairness to the designers, many of them were able to deliver the goods despite such limitations. Not a few were also able to make the most out of the friendly showdown by reaffirming their respective design sensibilities.

While the likes of Garimon Roferos and Federico Navarro chose the intricate route by fashioning long numbers adorned with a great deal of embroidery, fabric manipulation and beadwork, JC Buendia, Randy Ortiz, Joji Lloren and Rajo Laurel stuck to their guns with wearable and minimally embellished pieces.

Slim silhouettes

Roferos (who interpreted fashion in the Commonwealth era) was in his element as he presented a number of gowns and dresses with slim silhouettes that emphasized the female figure.

The Davao-based designer also incorporated banana fibers—with mixed results—and cultured pearls from Mindanao in a number of his dresses. He likewise used certain indigenous materials to embellish a black-and-white number.

Ramos (Commonwealth) also zeroed in on the female figure with pieces that either outlined the body or showed plenty of skin. In fact, he featured a two-piece number consisting of a midriff (in the form of a panuelo) and low-slung pants for the ultra slim and brave.

Like most of his colleagues, Ramos employed a collage of materials in his "party" collection—the era, after all, was synonymous to weekly, sometimes even nightly, parties—such as hand-painted jusi, dyed piña, stretched tulle, silk jacquard and embroidered cotton.

Buendia (American Colonial) channeled the Edwardian flavor evident in outfits worn by the Thomasites and came up with tailored red-and-black voile and cotton separates—including several beaded short shorts!—embellished with big bows and brooches.

Laurel (post-war) opted for a "light and airy" collection of pink and peach dresses inspired by the 1950s' movie studio system. Apart from emphasizing the waist, the designer made use of iconic accessories such as black wrist-length gloves and fascinators.

Alas, in his desire to make his pieces wearable, Laurel failed to come up with a single Gloria Romero moment—a drop-dead ball gown perhaps that would have defined a period when women were beginning to rediscover glamour and luxury after being deprived for so long during the war. Where's your sense of fashion history, Rajo?

Thus, his modest dresses—although not bad in themselves—suffered in comparison to his colleagues' more intricate and larger-than-life numbers fit for carnival queens.

Striking yet wearable

But as Ortiz (American Colonial) and Lloren (Spanish) showed, wearable and plain need not be synonymous.

Ortiz combined such materials as wool crepe and embroidered taffeta, which he infused with embroidered piña hablon and abel Iloco, to fashion striking yet wearable tailored separates for men and women.

In keeping with the period, Ortiz incorporated peplums, capelets and serpentine skirts in his arsenal of silhouettes. The overall look, although inspired by the past, was very now.

Lloren also capitalized on his mastery of tailoring to produce contemporary and "empowered" numbers inspired by a turn-of-the-century Maria Clara. He chucked delicate fabrics such as piña and jusi in favor of gray suiting and shirting materials.

Aside from refashioning panuelos into collars, he reshaped the traditional bell sleeves into more modern variations that included the coat, bishop and lantern sleeves. To add a dash or two of color, he added madras and broadcloth into the mix.

Even traditionalists like Patis Tesoro (Spanish) and Steve de Leon (Commonwealth) were able to tweak their respective collections consisting of stylized and updated Maria Claras.

The attempt was yet another testament to de Leon's artistry and craftsmanship, as the designer thought of fresh ways of using familiar fibers such as abaca, banana and piña and combining them with silk, taffeta and jusi.

De Leon's trademark origami figures found a fitting canvas in his intricate tops. He also did a number of traditional barongs made of banana fiber and silk thread.

Fresh faces

The show also became a venue for fresh faces. Aside from Roferos and Navarro, young John Herrera (the '80s) was able to hold his own with a collection inspired by the period's excesses as well as successes by avant-garde Japanese designers.

Herrera wisely eschewed vivid colors in favor of volume and structure as he mixed traditional fabrics such as jusi, linen, piña and piñaseda with trusty staples such as lycra, jersey, gauze and tulle.

To soften his dresses, he asked twin brother Paul to beef up his winning entry in the recent FDCP competition: strings upon strings of necklace adorned with black butterflies.

Veteran couturier Ben Farrales capped the show with a glittery ensemble consisting of heavily beaded and detachable red, white and blue ternos-cum-coats that revealed his trademark draped dresses.

It was a millennium collection with enough bling to make a blind man blanch. Indeed, in the hands of the "Dean," the future was so bright we ought to have worn shades.

KNOCKOUT!

The YSL look

By RIA FRANCISCO-PRIETO
INQUIRER

Each brand has a history and a personality of its own. Yves Saint Laurent is a brand that started in 1961. And the brand is all about sophistication, luxury and status.

I love how brands evolve. And a brand that has so much history is more than just a brand for me.

A brand with a history makes me appreciate more its value and legacy.

Great brands are also conversational pieces. They make for light but intelligent conversations.

Before Yves Saint Laurent ventured into beauty, he was (and still is) an undeniable leader in fashion. His couture house has always aimed to create confident, glamorous and perfectly stylish looks that big stars wear in the most celebrated events such as the Oscars and Golden Globes.

I learned that YSL also contributed many fashion firsts such as the tuxedo, safari jacket, peajacket, and trousers for women.

Now that I am aware of those, I will never see a pantsuit or a top with matching pants without thinking of how it wouldn't be possible without Mr. Yves Saint Laurent's vision.

Personally I'm just happy knowing that I may never be able to afford an Yves Saint Lauren suit. But it doesn't mean I can never own something from this great fashion house.

Luckily for all of us we can purchase a beauty product that is still true to Yves Saint Laurent's vision and history but in a more consumer-friendly price.

From fragrances, makeup and skincare, YSL is still widely associated with glamour, style and luxury.

Skin

When it comes to the face, your skin is your canvas. No matter how beautiful your features may be, uneven skin tone and zits will be a great detractor no one can afford to have.

Luckily, in 1992, Yves Saint Laurent unveiled a comprehensive and easy-to-use skincare regimen line.

Touche Èclat is the YSL highlighter pen that adds radiance to dull, lifeless skin. When used, the skin looks well-maintained and nourished. Because of this light concealer, the user looks much younger.

And also because it is light, it is great to use from day to night since you can just as easily put it on without the feeling of heaviness.

The Touche perfect touch foundation brush gives a transparent airy finish with full coverage.

It is great to use for setting makeup or simply allowing your skin to look flawless without too much effort. It's like a miracle wand, if you ask me!

My fave is Touche blush-puff that gives the user that instant glow we all strive to have. No need to go to the gym everyday (now, I don't really know if that is a good or a bad thing).

Another star Touche product is the volumizing mascara. Put it on and you don't have to wear fake lashes anymore!

OPINYON

The other ad

There's The Rub

By CONRADO DE QUIROS
PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

I remember again a joke I heard many years ago about Ferdinand Marcos. A foreign correspondent came to town and wanted to get a feel of the public sentiment about Marcos. He chanced upon a man in the street and asked to interview him. The man agreed, and the journalist asked him, "What do you think of Marcos?"

The man froze and said, "I can't answer that question here, the walls have ears, we have to go elsewhere." They went to a park and the journalist repeated his question. The man still looked anxious and said, "This place is still too full of people, we have to go to a more secluded place." They went to a pier, and again the journalist repeated his question. The man replied: "Please excuse my nervousness, but just to be sure let's take a boat and row out into the water."

They did so, and the journalist said, "So now, we're all alone, no one can hear us. What do you think about Marcos?" And the man whispered, "I actually like him."

Something not unlike this happened to me recently. It was a reunion of sorts in the province, and in the middle of the festivities someone pulled me aside to ask, "Why do you keep attacking GMA [Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo]—don't you see anything good in what she does?" After blinking a few times at the suddenness of the question, I said as pleasantly as I could, "No." And I asked him why he had to pull me aside to ask it. "Because," he said beyond earshot of the others, "I'm actually maka-GMA."

Why am I not surprised that someone who wants to profess to be a fan of GMA now has to do it in secret?

I remembered these because of an ad that I keep seeing with numbing regularity each time I watch the NBA on Basketball TV. In the ad, a singer of a band sings in a plaintive Freddie Aguilar-type voice a paean to the legit numbers racket known as the sweepstakes. At least the Philippine Charity Sweepstakes Office (PCSO) is the ostensible subject of the paean. But Arroyo's ubiquitous face there shows otherwise.

The lyrics are positively ingratiating. The reason I know the words is their sheer repetition, the ad materializing at nearly every commercial break, giving me a case not just of "last song syndrome" but of being subjected to hypnotic suggestion under torture. It's tapered off over the last few days but last I looked, it was still there. The song goes:

"Ikaw ang kanlungan sa kahirapan/ Ikaw ang pagasa at kinabukasan/ Haplos mo ay lunas sa bawat pagal/ Ikaw ang dampi ng pagmamahal: PCSO." ["You are the refuge from poverty/ You are the hope and the future/ Your stroke cures every tired body/ Yours is the caress of caring: PCSO."] While this is being sung, Arroyo is portrayed in various poses of solicitousness. No, the office is not the object of adulation, the person is.

Every time I see that ad—which is inescapable unless I foreswear to give up the NBA—I ask aloud, "E sino ba ang nakakapagal sa bawat pagal sa bansang ito?" ["Who is making the tired of this country tired?"] Take it from her name.

My first reaction upon seeing this ad was annoyance, particularly because it came at the break of a particularly suspenseful game where my favorite team, the Phoenix Suns, was trailing its opponent. My subsequent reaction from seeing it again and again—enough to give me the paranoid feeling it is expressly aimed at me—was awe at the cheekiness of it. And no small amount of infuriation that I and the other taxpayers of this country, who earn our money honestly through the sweat of our brow, were being fried in our own fat.

We saw the same ad before in different clothing but with the same ferocious ubiquity during the 2004 elections. The PCSO—and Philippine Amusement and Gaming Corp.—ran ads then depicting Arroyo as the secular version of Our Mother of Perpetual Help: visiting the victims of floods, earthquakes and natural disasters. Then too you wanted to say: Forget the natural disasters, mind only the human one. Or forget the supertyphoons, mind only Typhoon Gloria.

My unhappiness over the new PCSO ad was soon dispelled, however, by the realization that it does serve an eminently useful purpose. Which is that it draws attention to the one thing the administration candidates would rather have the world forget, who is Arroyo. Arroyo is not a candidate in these elections, but she might as well be so. She is the issue in them in the same way that Marcos was the issue in the 1971 elections and George W. Bush was the issue in last year's American elections. The latter two were also senatorial elections but they became a referendum on the two presidents. Arroyo's burden is by far the heavier in this respect because her unpopularity comes not just from a widespread perception of misrule but from a widespread perception of having no right to rule.

Except for Mike Defensor who has tried to brave or brazen it out, admitting freely he is an Arroyo protégé, but trying to score points with Joseph Estrada's hordes as well by calling for his release, nobody else in the Team Unity ticket wants to be associated too closely with their boss. Or, heaven forbid, to remind the voters with such ardent passion they are her alter ego.

Comes now this ad that does exactly that, an ad that not only grossly intrudes on the Filipino male's (and probably female's as well) favorite pastime, if not secret pleasure, but shows him exactly where his taxes, much expanded by the expanded value-added tax, are going. It is not to charitable works, such as portrayed in the ad, it is to indulgences like the ad itself, which is nothing more or less than (costly) electioneering. The ad's intention is clearly to convince the public their president cares for them. Its effect is unwittingly to tell the voters: You want more of this, vote for Arroyo's minions. You want a respite, reject them.

Justice, like the Lord, has been known to work in mysterious ways.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Nurses are being punished while cheats stay free

May I react to the news report about the need for the June 2006 nursing board passers to retake and pass Test 3 and 5 of the Nursing Licensure Examination before they can be granted the VisaScreen certificate. (Inquirer, 2/16/07)

Nurses, especially those who passed the June 2006 board exam, are again at the losing end, while the guilty parties are still free.

Instead of penalizing the culprits and addressing the brain drain issue, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo is moving heaven and earth to export our nurses abroad. It is all about dollar remittances to keep afloat the Philippine economy. The stain on the nursing profession in the Philippines remains because the culprits, the ones behind the test leakage, are yet to be penalized.

While the administration has been kicking out local executives belonging to the opposition, the government has never lifted a finger to penalize guilty parties in the nursing leakage fiasco. And to think that nurses and the nursing profession deal with life and death. Is political survival more important than the Filipino people's health and safety?

The officials of the US Commission on Graduates of Foreign Nursing Schools (CGFNS) are concerned about the quality of nursing service that the June 2006 board exam "passers" will be able to give to the American people—a far cry from this government, which cares only about money remittances, political favors and staying in office.

JENNY MANUEL
Via e-mail

ICC still reviews project proposals

This is in response to the news item "Gov't warned against wasting ODA funds" (Inquirer, 2/15/07), which reported that "future infrastructure project approvals would bypass the ICC."

The National Economic and Development Authority (Neda) wishes to clarify that the inter-agency Investment Coordination Committee (ICC), which is under the Neda Board and the Cabinet, continues to review and recommend projects for the Neda Board's consideration.

The report quoted former Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Felipe Medalla as saying, "I was told that ICC review is no longer necessary and proponents can now go directly to the agencies."

Executive Order 230 (Reorganizing the Neda), which was issued on July 22, 1987, mandates the ICC to: (1) evaluate the fiscal, monetary and balance of payments implications of major national projects and recommend to the President the timetable of the implementation of these projects on a regular basis; and (2) recommend to the President a domestic and foreign borrowing program updated each year, and subsequently submit to the President a status of the fiscal, monetary and balance of payments implications of major national projects.

In carrying out this mandate, major national projects are submitted or proposed by government agencies to the ICC for review, under guidelines issued by the ICC.

A major national project is a public investment (including public-private partnership such as the build-operate-transfer scheme) that costs at least P500 million and is undertaken by the national government through its agencies and corporations.

The ICC is composed of the finance secretary as chair; the Neda director-general as co-chair; and the executive secretary, the secretaries of agriculture, trade and industry, energy, budget and management, and the governor of the central bank, Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas, as members.

We hope this letter will clarify matters and set the record straight.

ROLANDO G. TUNGPALAN
Via email

AT LARGE

Migrants' manifesto

By RINA JIMENEZ-DAVID
INQUIRER

From some friends comes this "Migrants' Manifesto" that a group of Filipinos overseas has prepared in time for the coming elections. The manifesto, presented in a PowerPoint format, calls on all overseas Filipinos to use their numbers and influence to initiate real change in the Philippines by forging an agenda that candidates could adopt for better governance.

"With already 10 percent of the country's 80 million citizens supporting families back home, there is both an opportunity and a challenge for migrants and overseas workers to effectively exercise this political clout towards influencing public policy back home and ultimately in shaping the national development agenda," the manifesto states.

Last year, cash remittances from overseas Filipinos reached $14 billion, according to official records, equivalent to almost 15 percent of the gross domestic product, and supporting 16-20 million families. "This could fuel economic growth and fight poverty if properly harnessed. For this reason, we are compelled to exercise our right to … seek solidarity of all concerned citizens to support our advocacy," the manifesto states.

In their preamble, the migrant groups state that: "We, the overseas Filipinos worldwide, urge each and everyone in the coming May electoral contest to implore all political parties, emerging parties and their respective candidates to bring forth a platform based campaign so that the electorate can choose credible persons who are worthy to lead the nation."

■ ■ ■

In their analysis, the "root causes of human insecurity and threats to overall peace and development" can be traced to the following:

■ Conditions of inequity, with an elite few controlling power and economic resources;

■ Abject poverty;

■ Poor governance;

■ Injustice, abuse of authority and violations of human rights; and

■ Marginalization of minority groups.

Despite these many problems, though, the Philippines has seen "squandering of billions of pesos from legitimate and illegitimate sources," which the migrants say "had been a common scenario in a personality- and patronage-based electoral contest in the Philippines."

The manifesto thus proposes a platform-based campaign that would, first of all, sustain poverty-reduction efforts by ensuring equitable growth, and then ensuring that "poor people have political power," that is, giving them "a real voice and space."

Part of the process of creating a new platform-based politics is holding accountable "the powerful and/or the elites, whether political leaders, corporation or other influential actors" for their "actions, (and) their success or failure in (carrying out) their individual or party platforms that promise good governance."

■ ■ ■

"We challenge those who want to become legitimate servants and leaders to articulate a concrete and doable developmental plan aimed at the Filipino migrant workers around the world," the manifesto adds. "We pledge to support legitimate servants of the people running for any public position that aggressively promote the interests of our sector."

Among the details of the migrants' platform:

■ Institute meaningful comprehensive electoral reforms, starting with the removal of the residency requirement in the Absentee Voting Law. Introduce laws that will create transparency [in] campaign expenditures, [including] verifiable financial sources, imposing a limit on individual, group and corporate campaign donations.

■ Create an office with a Cabinet status such as a Department of Migration and Development that will truly work for the interests of migrant workers. Set up an advisory board composed of qualified, dedicated and credible overseas Filipinos to advice the department.

How can overseas Filipinos take part in this campaign? The manifesto suggests that those interested sign the online petition at http://www.PetitionOnline.com/OFWMan/ "if you are convinced of the Migrants' Manifesto"; forward the online petition, the PowerPoint presentation and the OFW Blogspot at http://filipinosworldwide.blogspot.com/ to your concerned friends, colleagues and extensive networks across the globe; and send your comments and/or suggestions to ofwmanifestor@yahoo.com to ensure a continuous enrichment process.

"Let's enable the citizenry, including eligible overseas voters and members of their families in the Philippines to make informed decisions," the manifesto declares.

"Let's ensure that only those candidates with clear and sincere intentions of promoting the welfare of the migrant sector, their families, and millions of poor people in our country are elected to public office!"

SAMU'T SARI

Saipan Community's Filipino Vesper Service celebrates 19th year

The Saipan Community Church Filipino Vesper Service celebrated its 19th anniversary last Sunday, February 18, 2007 with the theme:

"God's faithfulness to the church."

"We've seen God's faithfulness over the years...Let's continue to have faith in God's faithfulness in our lives. We've got to trust Him that He is faithful. Our faith is nothing without believing in the faithfulness of God," said SCC associate pastor Roger Abe in his remarks during the event, which was held at SCC compound in Susupe.

The celebration service, which began at 5pm to 730pm, was attended by over 100 people.

During the program, Millet Wong delivered the history of the Filipino congregation church, which started in February 1988.

Pastor Lito Rey served as the first pastor of the Filipino service.

Rey had served until 1999.

In 2000, Pastor Ernie Pinzon pastored the congregation until 2004.

Pinzon is now based in Canada with wife Fe.

Abe with his wife Teresita and son Nathan arrived in 2005.

The anniversary celebration was also highlighted by several production numbers from church members.

Krystele Anne E. Chavez rendered a song titled, Imagine me without you.

Gideon Pacheco, Gian Hidalgo, and Tess Iriarte delivered their separate testimonies.

The Children's church, meantime, gave an impressive dance and song number under the supervision of Rose Adams.

The Young People's Cell Group came next with their interpretative dance, Love in Any Language.

San Antonio cell group II sang Dakilang Katapatan while Joyce Guiloreza and Ernie Villarin rendered a duet.

Both Abe and senior pastor Greg Dickerman acknowledged the group and gave certificates of appreciation to the couple Ben and Mimi Maghanoy for their valuable contribution to the ministry from the beginning.

The program ended with a simple dinner prepared by different cell group members.

Lewie Adams served as the worship leader.

The Saipan Community Church Filipino Vesper Service meets at 5:00 pm every Sunday.

It has 17 cell groups that meet on different dates throughout the Island: Saipan Beach Hotel on Mondays at 7pm., Lakshmi Beauty Salon in Garapan on Tuesdays at 7:30pm., On Wednesdays at Calagues Residence in Airport at 8pm, Miemban's residence in San Jose at 7pm, and at the Borromeo's residence in Dandan at 8:45pm. On Thursdays at Munez residence in Kagman at 8pm., Pedernal's residence in Navy hill at 7pm.

On Fridays at the Maghanoy's residence in Lower Navy hill at 7pm. Wong's residence in San Antonio at 7pm, Niedo's residence in San Antonio at 7pm., Chavez residence in Susupe at 7pm., Joshua Generation School in Koblerville at 5:30pm., San Nicholas residence in San Roque at 6pm. and at the Valles residence in Navy Hill at 3pm. On Saturdays, at the Adams residence in As Lito at 8pm. Aqua Resort Barracks in Papago and the Youth cell group at the Ministry Center at the Saipan Community Church at 5:30pm. ***(Bing Chavez)***

Cell group leaders of the Filipino Vesper congregation gather for a photo.

BING CHAVEZ

The members of the SCC Youth Group gather for a photo shortly before their interpretative dance at the church compound.

BING CHAVEZ

From left: Saipan Community Church associate pastor Roger Abe, Ben and Mimi Maghanoy, and senior Pastor Greg Dickerman during the 19th anniversary of SCC Filipino Vesper service on Feb. 18, 2007. The Maghanoys were given certificates of recognition for their valuable contribution to the ministry.

BING CHAVEZ

Krystele E. Chavez renders a song, Imagine Me Without You, during the anniversary celebration.

BING CHAVEZ

Children church members perform a dance and song number during the anniversary.

Maharlika
PINOY LIFE IN THE MARIANAS

Published daily at 2/F CIC Centre, Beach Road, Garapan, Saipan, CNMI • MAILING ADDRESS: PMB 34, Box 10001, Saipan, MP, 96950 • PUBLISHER: John Pangelinan • EDITOR: Jayvee L. Vallejera • ASSISTANT EDITOR: Mark Rabago • NEWS DESK: For news tips, corrections and requests for news coverage, call (670) 235-NEWS (6397), 235-2440, fax 235,3740 • E-MAIL: editor@saipantribune.com. WEBSITE: www.saipantribune.com • CUSTOMER SERVICE: For inquiries, purchase of back issues and complaints, call (670) 235-8747, 235-2440, fax 235-3740 • SUBSCRIPTION: Published Monday to Sunday, Saipan Tribune offers door-to-door on-island delivery at an annual rate of $182. Off-island subscription rate is $376 per year. For additional subscription information, call 235-8747 or 235-2769, or fax 235-3740 • ADVERTISING: For inquiries contact 235-2769. E-MAIL: sales@saipantribune.com